

Lapeer parish's new altar is rescued rare find

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The new Carrera marble altar at Immaculate Conception Parish, Lapeer, once appeared in the 1986 movie “Wise Guys.” (Photo by Laura Brestovansky)

Lapeer — Most church renovations involve installing new fixtures. Not so for Immaculate Conception Parish in Lapeer, whose “new” altar is more than a century old and even appeared in a major motion picture.

The parish recently purchased a Carrera marble altar from St. Lucy Church in Jersey City, N.J. St. Lucy was built in 1895 but closed in 1989, and the church building had remained vacant for several years. Immaculate Conception’s pastor, Fr. Douglas Terrien, said he learned the altar was available several years ago.

“We had been planning to build a new church in 2007,” Terrien said. “We had been working with a company called Sacred Places. They found out about the altar at St. Lucy and let us know.”

Plans for a new Immaculate Conception Church — the original was built in 1864 — fell through because of the economic downturn, but an anonymous parishioner contributed half of the funds needed for the \$60,000 altar installation.

“White Carrera marble comes from Italy; it is considered the finest marble available,” Fr. Terrien said. “It’s the marble Michelangelo used for his sculptures. This marble has green onyx accents, and we were told by one source you can’t even get it anymore.”

The altar, and its former home, has the distinction of having appeared on the silver screen. St. Lucy was featured in the 1986 film, “Wise Guys” with Danny DeVito and Joe Piscopo.

It’s not Immaculate Conception’s first encounter with Hollywood, however. The church also is home to the St. Jude statue before which Danny Thomas prayed for help with his career. In return, he promised to build a shrine to St. Jude, which was the inspiration for St. Jude Hospitals.

The installation of the 7,000-pound altar is being completed by two men from Wolverine Stone. The former wooden altar has already been removed and installed in the parish’s St. Louise Chapel in nearby Metamora. While the work continues, daily Masses take place in the adjacent Bishop Kelley School while weekend Masses and perpetual adoration continue in the main church.

The project is expected to continue for another two weeks, but parishioners have already made the altar their own. They’ve been invited to place holy cards, rosaries and other items within the altar.

“We as a parish have placed a scapular within it,” Fr. Terrien said. “After all, we are Immaculate Conception Parish.”